

## Healthy Soils Task Force (HSTF) Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)

Thursday, February 6, 2020  
Nebraska Dept. of Agriculture  
301 Centennial Mall South, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Lincoln, NE 68509

Members Present: Jerry Allemann, Richard Bartek, Keith Berns, Hannah Birge, Lisa Lunz, Mike McDonald, Nathan Pflueger, Jeff Steffen, Steve Tucker, Alex Brechbill, staff for Senator Tim Gragert, Heidi Borg, staff for Senator Julie Slama, Raymond Ward, Steve Wellman and Greg Whitmore

Member Present by Phone: Bob Bettger

Members Absent: Ron Bolze and Charles Shapiro

Staff and Audience Attending: Steve Roth, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Keith Byerly, Soil Health Partnership; Aaron Hird, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Alan Moeller, Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy; Boone McAfee, Nebraska Corn Board; Ansley Mick, Nebraska Farm Bureau, and Kim Davis, staff, Senator Tim Gragert

*The following materials referenced in the minutes below are available on the [Healthy Soils Task Force \(HSTF\)](#) webpage on the Nebraska Department of Agriculture website: Education Committee Activities Summary<sup>(1)</sup>; Economics Committee PowerPoint<sup>(2)</sup>; Ecosystems Committee Report (draft)<sup>(3)</sup>; Initiative Committee meeting minutes<sup>(4)</sup>; Initiative Subcommittee report<sup>(5)</sup>; New York<sup>(6)</sup> and South Dakota<sup>(7)</sup> healthy soils initiatives/proposals.*

Meeting was called to order at 1 p.m. CST.

Chairman Keith Berns reported that the meeting was being operated under the Open Meetings Act and that a copy of the Open Meetings Act was posted on the wall of the meeting room.

Berns also noted that a Public Meeting Notice was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on Jan. 24, 2020. An affidavit of the notice was available for review.

The minutes for the Nov. 19, 2019, meeting were accepted as presented. The agenda was approved as previously presented.

The following financial report, compiled by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's Finance and Accounting staff, reflects travel expenses through the end of 2019 and was accepted as presented:

8/1/2019 - 12/31/2019

Expense		
Meeting Notices	\$	30.54
TSB Rental	\$	27.49
Mileage	\$	1,200.59
Parking	\$	18.25
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,276.87</b>

## Page 2 – Healthy Soil Task Force Feb. 6, 2020 Minutes

Education Committee Chair Lisa Lunz presented a summary<sup>(1)</sup> of the activities that have been conducted by the committee since its formation. Lunz commented that the committee has completed its assignments to date and does not plan to meet again unless otherwise requested by HSTF Chair Berns.

Economics Committee Chair Jeff Steffen gave a PowerPoint<sup>(2)</sup> presentation centered around topics brought up by his committee meeting regarding possible incentives to promote soil health. The presentation was titled “Community Based Regenerative Agriculture for the Health and Prosperity of Rural and Urban Nebraska.”

Following the presentation, committee members discussed several possible approaches to communicating the economic benefits of implementing sound healthy soil practices. There was also discussion regarding messaging.

Ecosystems Committee Chair Hannah Birge presented a draft<sup>(3)</sup> of a document being developed by her committee regarding the increase of companies/entities seeking farmers who are adopting regenerative agriculture. The companies offer pay to farmers for providing carbon storage and other ecosystem services.

Birge said the carbon market is starting to grow rapidly, and there are concerns that farmers may not receive enough information to make prudent decisions when entering into contracts. The committee wants to provide farmers with information and questions that should assist them in making decisions should they be approached by a company or entity wanting to enter into a carbon storage agreement. The committee report is still in the draft stage with plans for updating at a future date.

Initiative Committee Chair Keith Berns reported that his committee met in December and discussed a myriad of topics ranging from education, conservation practices, legislation and funding for conservation practices. Those discussions are reflected in the committee meeting minutes<sup>(4)</sup>.

In addition, an Initiative Committee subcommittee was appointed to examine the possible formation of a Nebraska soil and water health entity. The subcommittee is comprised of HSTF members Mike McDonald and State Senator Tim Gragert, along with Dean Edson, Nebraska Association of Resource Districts, and Alan Moeller, Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy.

The subcommittee of the Initiative Committee met in December to begin the process of laying a foundation for the formation of a Nebraska soil and water health entity<sup>(5)</sup>. Berns said a possible name for such an entity is yet to be determined. Subcommittee members laid out what the purpose and function of such an entity might be in a report that was presented at the HSTF meeting.

HSTF members then engaged in a discussion that revolved around whether or not creating a new entity is necessary or whether or not it is actually part of what the HSTF is charged with accomplishing as outlined in the statute that created it.

### **Page 3 – Healthy Soil Task Force Feb. 6, 2020 Minutes**

Following the discussion, Berns said he felt it would be beneficial for committee chairs to meet with him prior to the next HSTF meeting to discuss clarifying what direction the Task Force needs to take in order to meet its goals as directed by statute. Committee chairs agreed to do so and will meet with Berns prior to the next HSTF meeting.

Berns said it would be beneficial for Task Force members to review two reports he emailed previously regarding proposed healthy soils initiatives taking place in New York<sup>(6)</sup> and South Dakota<sup>(7)</sup>.

Task Force member Mike McDonald presented the idea of conducting surveys with stakeholders who will be attending various agricultural meetings around the state. He said that even though the surveys would be random and not follow statistical guidelines, they would still provide input that could be beneficial to the Task Force as they begin the process of developing a state healthy soils plan/initiative.

Other Task Force members agreed that conducting such surveys would be a positive step in gathering input as well as creating awareness of the activities the HSTF has been conducting.

McDonald presented dates and locations of meetings where surveys could be conducted and said he would work with Task Force members and other volunteers to try to get the meetings covered. He said he would work with other Task Force members to develop survey content.

The next meeting of the Healthy Soils Task Force was set for Thursday, March 12, at 1 p.m. CST at the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 301 Centennial Mall South, 4th Floor, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Meeting adjourned at 4:39 p.m.